“Cyber-Orientalism and the Virtualization of an Image: Edward Said's Legacy for a Digital Century”

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To Edward Said, "Orientalism depends for its strategy on [a] flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand." What was acutely discerned by Said in 1978, the fact that "Orientalism is...a distribution of geopolitical awareness," finds an augmented echo in the way cyberspace is constructed, occupied, and disseminated through a still predominantly occidental cyber-apparatus ranging from seemingly innocuous social networking and inter-connectedness on a planetary scale, to military simulators (for combat, for cultural immersion into the "Orient" and for virtual PTSD therapy) to drone warfare, all of which take place, concomitantly, on the "theater" and "stage" of the Arab world and in the command and control sites in the heart of the United States. Indeed, In Orientalism, Said wrote that the Orient was not an "inert fact of nature," that it was "not merely there," just as the Occident was "not just there either." Said's question, "What other sorts of intellectual, aesthetic, scholarly, and cultural energies went into the making of an imperialist tradition like the Orientalist one?" finds itself renewed in the explosion of transnational cyber-writing about and by the "Orient" on a scale not envisioned by Said even as he noticed the "electronic, postmodern world," which effected a "reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed," namely television, the film industry, and "all the media's resources" that have "forced information into more and more standardized molds." Although the Internet has been a precious tool in the re-formation of Arab identity and the subsequent revolutions put together under the general term of "Arab Spring," the Western propensity to use the same tools to exacerbate differences between Occident and Orient has continued unabated.